FERTILITY—JUST AS IMPORTANT AS ON CROPLANDS

Soil fertilization can help you control forage quality, yield and diversity. Fertilizing and liming promote vigorous stands of forage by adding nutrients to the soil.

Soil sampling and testing are critical to effective pasture fertility management. Soil testing will help you assess available nutrients for the forage crop and determine how much fertilizer and lime to apply to each pasture to meet your yield goals.

For information on how to take a soil sample and where to send it for testing, contact your local NRCS or Extension office.

Taking a soil sample is a critical step in developing a sound fertility management program on your pasture.

Nitrogen

The most commonly applied fertilizer in a non-legume pasture is nitrogen (N), some of which is applied naturally through animal manure. If you begin to see "cow spots" or much taller, greener grass around "cow pies," it may mean the pasture is nitrogen deficient.

Nitrogen applied in late summer can help provide more forage and extend grazing into December. For the best results, apply nitrogen in August and rest pastures until late September or early October. A wet fall will enhance forage growth if fertility is adequate and in a dry fall the nitrogen will carry over to the spring.

Phosphorus and Potassium

Late summer and early fall is also a good time to apply phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) to grass or grass legume pastures. Soil tests are your best guide in determining what is needed.

Liming

Lime is often needed in pastures to neutralize acidic soil and improve pasture productivity. Plants, especially legumes, are unable to use nutrients in soil that is too acidic. Micronutrients, which are obtained through liming, are essential for normal growth of pasture plants to meet livestock needs. Lime according to soil test recommendations when pH is below 6.0, or consult your local NRCS or Extension office for a general rate of application.

Applying fertilizer (left) and lime (below) are steps often needed to improve pasture productivity.